



Citizenship agency eyes improved service without plan to pay

By ELLIOT SPAGAT and
SOPHIA TAREEN

Associated Press

SAN DIEGO (AP) — Less than a year after being on the verge of furloughing about 70% of employees to plug a funding shortfall, the U.S. agency that grants citizenship wants to improve service without a detailed plan to pay for it, including waivers for those who can't afford fees, according to a proposal obtained by The Associated Press.

The Homeland Security Department sent its 14-page plan to enhance procedures for becoming a naturalized citizen to the White House for approval on April 21.

CITIZEN STRAIN



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This June 5, 2015, file photo, shows a view of the Homeland Security Department headquarters in Washington.

Associated Press

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Citizenship agency eyes improved service without plan to pay



In this Monday, Aug. 26, 2019, file photo, people raise their hands as they take the oath of allegiance on their way to becoming new United States citizens before a baseball game in San Diego.

Associated Press

Continued from Front

It involves U.S. Citizenship and Immigration Services, which is part of Homeland Security and operates entirely on fees.

The plan describes changes that reflect "a realistic assessment of our aspirations and limitations," including more video instead of in-person applicant interviews, authorizing employees to administer citizenship oaths versus relying on federal judges, and promoting online filing to reduce processing times.

Homeland Security says it can be done without the approval of Congress, where consensus on immigration has proven elusive. Taken together, the changes mark a complete break from the Trump administration, when the agency focused on combatting fraud and adjusted to shrinking immigration benefits.

The plan also seeks to give potential U.S. citizens the benefit of the doubt. For instance, it specifies that an immigrant who mistakenly registers to vote in U.S. elections before becoming a citizen won't be punished. Doing so now can lead to deportation or criminal charges, likely ending a person's chance for citizenship.

The issue has been in the spotlight amid a recent surge in automatic voter

registration and former President Donald Trump's repeated unsubstantiated claims that millions of people voted illegally in 2016. Last year, Illinois' automatic voter registration program mistakenly registered hundreds of people who said they weren't U.S. citizens. At least one voted.

The agency will improve the citizenship process to "encourage full participation in our civic life and democracy" and to deliver services effectively and efficiently, according to the document.

It doesn't provide cost estimates for the proposed changes, though there are options on the table and some measures appear designed to save money and achieve efficiencies. It also acknowledges success depends on long-term financial stability, which includes asking Congress for money.

Under the plan, the agency would continue subsidizing the costs of becoming a citizen to make sure the process is available to as many people as possible. The administration "recognizes that the cost of fees can be a barrier" so "other fee-paying applicants and petitioners will continue to subsidize this policy decision to ensure full cost recovery," the document reads.

Asked about the status of

the proposal, U.S. Citizenship and Immigration Services said it's reviewing policies and practices.

"Under the Biden Administration, the agency has made considerable strides in reallocating our resources and priorities to fulfill this mission and address challenges like the ones caused by the COVID-19 pandemic," spokesman Joe Sowers said in a statement Tuesday. "Ultimately, USCIS is committed to administering our nation's legal immigration system in a way that empowers immigrants to pursue citizenship and the privileges that accompany it."

Immigration attorneys called the proposed changes a welcomed shift after the Trump administration.

Sharvari Dalal-Dheini, director of government relations for the American Immigration Attorneys Association, said expanding video interviews would be more efficient and convenient for people far from immigration offices, some of which continue to operate at reduced capacity because of the pandemic.

"They have a huge backlog they need to work out of," she said. "Having those creative solutions, will help them dig out of that backlog."

Danielle Spooner, head of the union representing

agency workers, said video would benefit employees who've been working from home, but administering the oath, a once-in-a-lifetime experience, should be left to judges.

Questions about how the agency would fund the changes made her uneasy, saying employee morale remains low since last summer's near financial catastrophe.

That's when the agency threatened more than 13,000 furloughs to tackle a projected \$1.26 billion shortfall. But a few tense months later, it said it didn't need the money after all and would end the year with a surplus. Agency leaders said application fees rebounded more than expected as offices reopened from coronavirus shutdowns and contracts were reviewed for cost savings.

The anticipated shortfall first surfaced in November 2019, when the agency proposed major fee increases — well before COVID-19 threatened finances.

The budget whiplash raised doubts about how the agency's finances deteriorated so rapidly then suddenly recovered. Ur Jaddou, who was nominated by President Joe Biden in April to lead the agency and has a Wednesday hearing before the Senate

Judiciary Committee, was among those with questions.

Jaddou, who served as the agency's chief counsel under President Barack Obama, said in October that the agency needed a financial audit. She questioned some Trump administration changes, including justification for a major expansion of an anti-fraud unit, since abandoned by Biden.

"It really is a bunch of bureaucratic red tape," she said when discussing agency financial woes.

Fees were set to increase by an average of 20% last October but a federal judge blocked them. The wait to process a citizenship application grew to more than a year by the end of Trump's presidency from less than eight months four years earlier.

"By having your own budget, you can be very nimble," he said. "Losing your budget leaves you at the whim of Congress and all of a sudden immigration gets politicized."

One potential avenue for boosting revenue is expanding the use of so-called "premium processing." For a hefty fee, it allows limited applicants a 15-day turnaround on some paperwork. Under emergency legislation in October, the agency raised it from \$1,440 to \$2,500 and allowed revenues to be used for operating expenses. USCIS appears on board, allowing the expedited option in February to some Australian nationals. Broadening it to more eligible forms could generate up to \$626 million annually, according to an analysis co-authored by Doug Rand, a former Obama administration official who founded an organization that helps people with immigration.

"When USCIS is plagued with problems and not delivering the services it is supposed to in a reasonable time, that's not just bad news for immigrants, it is bad news for U.S. citizens navigating the system," Rand said. □

It's not just Arizona: Push to review 2020 ballots spreads

By KATE BRUMBACK and
NICHOLAS RICCARDI
Associated Press

ATLANTA (AP) — Six months after Donald Trump's loss, conspiracy theorists and backers of former President Donald Trump are continuing their push for repeated examinations of ballots and finding limited successes.

A Georgia judge last week awarded a group the chance to review mail ballots in a large Georgia county that includes Atlanta. Officials in a rural Michigan county on Tuesday debated a review of their voting machines. A similar debate has caused sharp divisions in a New Hampshire town. In some cases, the efforts have been inspired by an audit of the votes in Arizona's Maricopa County, an elaborate exercise engineered by the GOP-led state Senate.

The efforts are unlikely to yield any new revelations about President Joe Biden's victory in the 2020 election. The votes have been counted — and often recounted — and certified by local officials. Still, the lingering debate and legal wrangling have propelled suspicions and advanced debunked theories. And their sometimes misleading conclusions have been amplified by Trump, whose false allegations of election fraud sparked the push.

The profusion of audits alarms election experts, who note that the Arizona audit has set a troubling new precedent of third-party, partisan review of the ballots, long after elections are over.

"This is bad enough to see it happen once," Eddie Perez, an expert on voting systems at the OSET Institute, said of Arizona, but seeing it elsewhere in the country is "dangerous for democracy."

The audits are serving a clear political purpose in firing up the Republican Party's base. At a rally outside Phoenix last week featuring GOP Reps. Matt Gaetz and Marjorie Taylor Greene, references to the Arizona audit drew much more enthusiastic applause than



In this May 6, 2021 file photo, Maricopa County ballots cast in the 2020 general election are examined and recounted by contractors working for Florida-based company, Cyber Ninjas at Veterans Memorial Coliseum in Phoenix.

Associated Press

immigration, normally the top hot-button issue on the right in the border state.

In a statement Monday night, Trump criticized Republican Party leaders for not doing more about "what went on" in November. He cited the ballot reviews underway and promised "more to follow."

The Arizona audit has been cited as a template for the others, though each is distinct. In Arizona, the Republican-controlled state Senate subpoenaed more than 2 million ballots and voting machines from Arizona's most populous county, which includes Phoenix, and gave control of the review to a small cybersecurity firm whose founder, Doug Logan, had tweeted pro-Trump election conspiracies.

Logan has ties to the Michigan effort as well. In April, Logan and another cybersecurity expert involved in the Arizona audit, Ben Cotton, filed separate expert witness reports alleging security problems in voting machines in a lawsuit filed in rural Antrim County, Michigan, that sought to compel a statewide election audit there. That case was dismissed by a judge last week — one of more than 60 court losses for pro-Trump groups in lawsuits challenging the 2020 elec-

tion.

But Logan's and Cotton's claims were used by a Michigan attorney to bolster the case for a "forensic audit" of voting machines in rural Cheboygan County, in northern Michigan, earlier this month.

"If you don't have your vote counted as it was intended to count, we don't have a free country," attorney Stefanie Lambert, who had filed an appeal of the dismissal of a separate, unsuccessful lawsuit challenging Trump's loss in Michigan, told the Cheboygan County elections committee. She offered to provide auditors free of charge.

On Tuesday, the county's Board of Commissioners heard impassioned arguments for and against the audit from an overflow crowd and did not take action. "Everyone needs to understand that we hear you, but we are proceeding very, very cautiously," Commissioner Ron Williams said.

Arizona has also inspired calls by pro-Trump groups to push for their own pick to take over a post-election audit of a statehouse race in Windham, New Hampshire — home of former Trump campaign manager Corey Lewandowski.

But the biggest new entry into the audit field is in

Georgia's Fulton County, where a judge on Friday ruled that plaintiffs could inspect 147,000 mail ballots as part of their lawsuit alleging fraud in the most populous county in the state.

The lawsuit was spearheaded by Garland Favorito, a longtime skeptic of Georgia's voting systems who has embraced conspiracy theories about 9/11, Clinton-era scandals and Supreme Court justices. Favorito says he voted for Don Blankenship, the U.S. Constitution Party candidate for president, last year.

"Our ultimate objective is the truth. What is the truth of this election?" Favorito said in an interview. "Don't tell us what the results are and then hide it from us and pretend we have to accept whatever you tell us."

Fulton County Chair Robb Pitts said in a statement: "It is outrageous that Fulton County continues to be a target of those who cannot accept the results from last year's election. The votes have been counted multiple times, including a hand recount, and no evidence of fraud has been found." Both sides are scheduled to meet Friday to discuss how to review the mail ballots. Favorito said Jovan Pulitzer, an inventor and key figure in the pro-Trump move-

ment to overturn the 2020 election, may be one of the people he consults for the ballot examination.

Pulitzer had pushed unsuccessfully for a statewide audit of Georgia's election results, even after two recounts by the Republican secretary of state confirmed that Biden won the state. That finding infuriated Trump, who has slammed both Secretary of State Brad Raffensperger and the state's Republican governor, Brian Kemp.

Former state Rep. Vernon Jones, a Trump backer who is challenging Kemp in the GOP primary, held a news conference outside the state Capitol last week to hammer the governor for not commissioning a statewide audit. "There's a dead cat on the end of this line, and we just want to find out what it is, that's all," Jones said. "People have a right to know. What are you hiding?"

That's the sort of sentiment that alarms Tammy Patrick, who used to oversee post-election audits in Maricopa County. Those examinations are essential, she argued, but must be conducted by election experts, not ideologically interested novices, and should be completed soon after voting.

"In a healthy democracy, you have an auditing process, you have legal recourse, and when that period is over, all the candidates who have won take over and you move on," said Patrick, an adviser at The Democracy Fund, adding that the people calling for audits clearly want only one result.

"They are not going to be satisfied," Patrick said. "This is just going to play out in perpetuity." □



GOP leaders condemn Greene over Holocaust comments

By BRIAN SLODYSKO

Associated Press

WASHINGTON (AP) — Republican leaders forcefully condemned GOP Rep. Marjorie Taylor Greene on Tuesday, calling her comments comparing COVID-19 safety measures like mask-wearing to the treatment of Jews in Nazi Germany “appalling.”

“Marjorie is wrong, and her intentional decision to compare the horrors of the Holocaust with wearing masks is appalling,” House Republican Leader Kevin McCarthy, R-Calif., said in a statement, which stopped short of calling for Greene to face disciplinary measures. “The fact that this needs to be stated today is deeply troubling.”

Greene, a conservative firebrand from Georgia and ally of former President Donald Trump, has thrived on stirring controversy, pushing conspiracy theories and forcefully confronting her colleagues since taking her seat in the House in January. But, until now, Republican leaders have proven hesitant to criticize her and refused to join with Democrats earlier this year when they voted to strip her of committee assignments. Their rebuke Tuesday came after Greene made an appearance on a conservative podcast, “The Water Cooler with David Brody,” released last Thursday. In her interview, Greene ex-



Rep. Marjorie Taylor Greene, R-Ga., speaks during a news conference, Wednesday, May 12, 2021, with Rep. Dan Bishop, R-N.C., back left, and former OMB Director and President of Citizens for Renewing America Russ Vought, as they express their opposition to “critical race theory,” during a news conference on Capitol Hill in Washington.

Associated Press

coriated safety protocols adopted by House Democrats, including a requirement that masks be worn on the House floor. She also called House Speaker Nancy Pelosi “mentally ill” and suggested that the rules were comparable to the treatment of Jews during the Holocaust.

“You know, we can look back in a time and history where people were told to wear a gold star. And they were definitely treated like second-class citizens, so much so that they were put in trains and taken to gas chambers in Nazi Germany,” Greene said on the

podcast. “This is exactly the type of abuse that Nancy Pelosi is talking about.”

After her remarks sparked a firestorm of online criticism, Greene leaned in to the comparison further. On Tuesday, she tweeted out a news story about a grocery store chain that plans to allow vaccinated employees to go maskless. Those who do would have a logo on their nametags indicating they had been vaccinated.

“Vaccinated employees get a vaccination logo just like the Nazi’s forced Jewish people to wear a gold star,” Greene tweeted.

Pelosi, who previously suggested that Greene could face an ethics inquiry, called her comments “so beyond reprehensible” that they should have “no place in our country.” Democratic Illinois Rep. Brad Schneider proposed censuring Greene.

Senate Minority Leader Mitch McConnell, R-Ky., called Greene’s comments one of her “frequent outbursts that are absolutely outrageous and reprehensible.” Still, he said any disciplinary action against her would have to come from the House.

Rep. Elise Stefanik, the No.

3 House GOP leader, said “equating mask wearing and vaccines to the Holocaust” minimized “the most significant human atrocities ever committed.”

The furor is just the latest provocative chapter in the activist-turned-lawmaker’s brief tenure in the House.

Earlier this month, Greene followed Rep. Alexandria Ocasio-Cortez off the House floor, shouting that the Democrat supported “terrorists” and doesn’t “care about the American people.” She also appeared in Facebook Live video filmed outside Ocasio-Cortez’s office, taunting the congresswoman through the mail slot of a locked door to “get rid of your diaper and come out and be able to talk to the American citizens.”

Before her election, Greene supported Facebook posts that advocated violence against Democrats and the FBI. In one 2018 post, she speculated that “lasers or blue beams of light” controlled by a left-wing cabal tied to a powerful Jewish family could have been responsible for sparking California wildfires.

And in February 2019, Greene appeared in an online video filmed at the U.S. Capitol, arguing that two Muslim lawmakers weren’t “really official” members of Congress because they didn’t take the oath of office on the Bible. □

Texas set to allow unlicensed handgun carry despite outcry



In this Jan. 26, 2015 file photo, a supporter of open carry gun laws, wears a pistol as he prepares for a rally in support of open carry gun laws at the Capitol, in Austin, Texas.

By JIM VERTUNO

Associated Press

Associated Press

AUSTIN, Texas (AP) — Texas is poised to remove one

of its last major gun restrictions after lawmakers approved allowing people to carry handguns without a license, and the background check and training that go with it.

The Republican-dominated Legislature approved the measure Monday, sending it to Gov. Greg Abbott, who has said he will sign it despite the objections of law enforcement groups who say it would endanger the public and police.

Gun control groups also oppose the measure, noting the state’s recent history of mass shootings,

including those at an El Paso Walmart, a church in Sutherland Springs, and a high school outside Houston.

Texas already has some of the loosest gun laws in the country and has more than 1.6 million handgun license holders.

Supporters of the bill say it would allow Texans to better defend themselves in public while abolishing unnecessary impediments to the constitutional right to bear arms. Once signed into law, Texas will join nearly two dozen other states that allow some form

of unregulated carry of a handgun, and by far be the most populous.

The National Rifle Association was among those supporting the measure, and a spokesman called it the “most significant” gun-rights measure in the state’s history.

Texas already allows rifles to be carried in public without a license. The measure sent to Abbott would allow anyone age 21 or older to carry a handgun as long as they don’t have felony criminal convictions or some other legal prohibition in their background. □

U.S. to reopen Jerusalem consulate, upgrading Palestinian ties

By JOSEPH KRAUSS

Associated Press

JERUSALEM (AP) — Secretary of State Antony Blinken announced Tuesday that the U.S. would reopen its Consulate General in Jerusalem — a move that restores ties with Palestinians that had been downgraded by the Trump administration.

The consulate long served as an autonomous office in charge of diplomatic relations with the Palestinians. But former U.S. President Donald Trump downgraded its operations and placed them under the authority of his ambassador to Israel when he moved the embassy to Jerusalem.

Trump's move infuriated the Palestinians, who view east Jerusalem as occupied territory and the capital of their future state.

Blinken did not give a precise date for reopening the consulate.

Blinken announced the step after a meeting with Palestinian President Mahmoud Abbas in Ramallah, in the occupied West Bank. "As I told the president, I'm here to underscore the commitment of the United States to rebuilding the relationship with the Palestinian Authority and the Palestinian people, a relationship built on mutual respect and also a shared conviction that Palestinians and Israelis alike deserve equal measures of security, freedom opportunity and dignity," he said.

Blinken is in the region to help shore up the ceasefire last week that ended a devastating war 11-day war between Israel and Gaza's militant Hamas rulers that killed more than 250 people, mostly Palestinians, and caused widespread destruction in the impoverished coastal territory.

He promised to "rally international support" to help Gaza in the wake of the war. He later announced nearly \$40 million in aid to the Palestinians, including \$5.5 million in emergency assistance for Gaza. That brings total U.S. assistance to the Palestinians under the Biden administration to

over \$360 million after the Trump administration had cut off nearly all assistance to them.

a return to violence, we have to use the space created to address a larger set of underlying issues and

since tensions are still high in Jerusalem and the fate of the Palestinian families is not yet resolved.

halting rocket attacks or dealing a heavier blow to Hamas.

Netanyahu hardly mentioned the Palestinians in his remarks after his meeting with Blinken, warning of a "very powerful" response if Hamas breaks the ceasefire.

Netanyahu spoke of "building economic growth" in the occupied West Bank, but said there will be no peace until the Palestinians recognize Israel as a "Jewish state." The Palestinians have long objected to that language, saying it undermines the rights of Israel's own Palestinian minority.

Blinken will also visit neighboring Egypt and Jordan, which have acted as mediators in the conflict. Egypt succeeded in brokering the Gaza truce after the Biden administration pressed Israel to wind down its offensive.

The administration had been roundly criticized for its perceived hands-off initial response to the deadly violence, including from Democratic allies in Congress who demanded it take a tougher line on Israel. Biden repeatedly affirmed what he said was Israel's right to defend itself from rocket attacks from Gaza.

The administration has defended its response by saying it engaged in intense, but quiet, high-level diplomacy to support a ceasefire.

Blinken has said the time is not right for an immediate resumption in Israeli-Palestinian negotiations, but that steps could be taken to repair the damage from Israeli airstrikes, which destroyed hundreds of homes and damaged infrastructure in Gaza.

The narrow coastal territory, home to more than 2 million Palestinians, has been under a crippling Israeli-Egyptian blockade since Hamas seized power. Israel says the blockade is needed to keep Hamas from importing arms, while the Palestinians and human rights groups view it as a form of collective punishment. □



Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu, right, and U.S. Secretary of State Antony Blinken hold a joint press conference in Jerusalem on Tuesday, May 25, 2021, days after an Egypt-brokered truce halted fighting between the Jewish state and the Gaza Strip's rulers Hamas.

Associated Press

Blinken has promised that any assistance will be kept out of the hands of Hamas, which does not recognize Israel's right to exist and which Israel and the U.S. consider a terrorist organization.

The U.S. is trying to bolster Abbas, who was sidelined by recent events, in his rivalry with Hamas and on the international stage. Abbas heads the internationally backed Palestinian Authority, which administers parts of the occupied West Bank but whose forces were driven from Gaza when Hamas seized power there in 2007. Abbas is seen by many Palestinians as having lost all legitimacy. But he is still seen internationally as the representative of the Palestinian people and a key partner in the long-defunct peace process.

The truce that ended the Gaza war on Friday has so far held, but it did not address any of the underlying issues in the Israeli-Palestinian conflict, something Blinken acknowledged after meeting earlier in the day with Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu.

"We know that to prevent

challenges. And that begins with tackling the grave humanitarian situation in Gaza and starting to rebuild," he said.

The top U.S. diplomat faces the same obstacles that have stifled a wider peace process for more than a decade, including a hawkish Israeli leadership, Palestinian divisions and deeply rooted tensions surrounding Jerusalem and its holy sites. The Biden administration had initially hoped to avoid being drawn into the intractable conflict and focus on other foreign policy priorities before the violence broke out.

The war was triggered by weeks of clashes in Jerusalem between Israeli police and Palestinian protesters in and around the Al-Aqsa Mosque compound, a site revered by Jews and Muslims that has seen several outbreaks of Israeli-Palestinian violence over the years. The protests were directed at Israel's policing of the area during the Muslim holy month of Ramadan and the threatened eviction of dozens of Palestinian families by Jewish settlers.

The truce remains tenuous

The evictions were put on hold just before the Gaza fighting erupted, but the legal process is set to resume in the coming weeks. Police briefly clashed with protesters at Al-Aqsa on Friday, hours after the ceasefire came into effect.

Adding to the tensions, an Israeli soldier and a civilian were stabbed and wounded in east Jerusalem on Monday before police shot and killed the assailant in what they described as a terrorist attack.

Then, early Tuesday, a Palestinian man was shot and killed by undercover Israeli forces near the West Bank city of Ramallah, according to the Wafa news agency. Pictures circulating online appeared to show the man bloodied and lying in the street. The Israeli army referred questions to the Border Police, which did not respond to requests for comment.

Netanyahu, meanwhile, is fighting for his political life after a fourth inconclusive election in two years. He faces mounting criticism from Israelis who say he ended the offensive prematurely, without forcibly

Mali's coup leader wrests back control of the government

By **BABA AHMED** and **KRISTA LARSON**

Associated Press

BAMAKO, Mali (AP) — Mali's former coup leader Assimi Goita took control of the West African country again Tuesday after firing the president and prime minister of the transitional government following their announcement of a cabinet reshuffle without his permission.

While Goita pledged to go ahead with holding new elections in 2022 as previously promised, his display of force casts doubt on whether the vote will go ahead without significant interference by the junta that overthrew the last democratically elected president last August.

The move also raised concerns that the new political unrest could further destabilize efforts to control Mali's long-running Islamic insurgency. The United Nations now spends some \$1.2 billion annually on a peacekeeping mission in Mali and France's military has spent eight years trying to stabilize its former colony amid the ongoing threat. The military's announcement on the state broadcaster Tuesday came a day after President Bah N'Daw



Malian police gather outside the Bourse du Travail where striking workers gathered to protest the arrest of President Bah N'Daw and Prime Minister Muctar Ouane by military personnel in Bamako, Mali, Tuesday May 25, 2021.

Associated Press

and Prime Minister Muctar Ouane were arrested by soldiers and brought to the military headquarters in Kati, about 15 kilometers (9 miles) outside the capital. Both men remained in detention Tuesday and there was no immediate word about their conditions.

Their arrests prompted an outcry by the international community, which put out a strongly worded statement warning Mali's military leaders that their actions

could undermine global support for the country. That joint statement made by the African Union, United Nations, the E.U., France and the U.S. among others called for the immediate release of the president and prime minister.

The West African regional bloc known as ECOWAS, which also endorsed the statement, said on Tuesday afternoon that it was sending a delegation to Bamako as the political crisis es-

calated. The regional body previously threatened the junta with sanctions if it did not install a civilian president and prime minister, and shorten the transitional period to 18 months.

The EU went a step further, warning Mali's military Tuesday that it was "ready to consider targeted measures against political and military leaders who obstruct the Malian transition." The new government announced on Monday had

left out two men who were prominent junta members: Interior Security Minister Modibo Kone and Defense Minister Sadio Camara. About an hour after the new Cabinet was named, the military rounded up the president and prime minister.

Goita, who led the junta calling itself the National Committee for the Salvation of the People, has served as Mali's vice president in the transitional government formed last September. He has held that position despite initial calls from the international community for an entirely civilian-led transition.

In announcing the removal of the civilian president and prime minister of the transitional government, the military also said that it would be relieving others from their duties including "everyone implicated in the situation."

Still, the military insisted: "The transition is following its normal course and elections will be held as anticipated in 2022." Following international pressure last year the junta had promised to organize that vote by next February, 18 months after the coup d'etat shook the country. □

Russian bill would bar Navalny allies from seeking office

By **VLADIMIR ISACHENKOV**
Associated Press

MOSCOW (AP) — Russian lawmakers on Tuesday gave preliminary approval to a bill that bars members of groups designated as extremist from running for public office, a measure intended to prevent allies of opposition leader Alexei Navalny from seeking parliament seats.

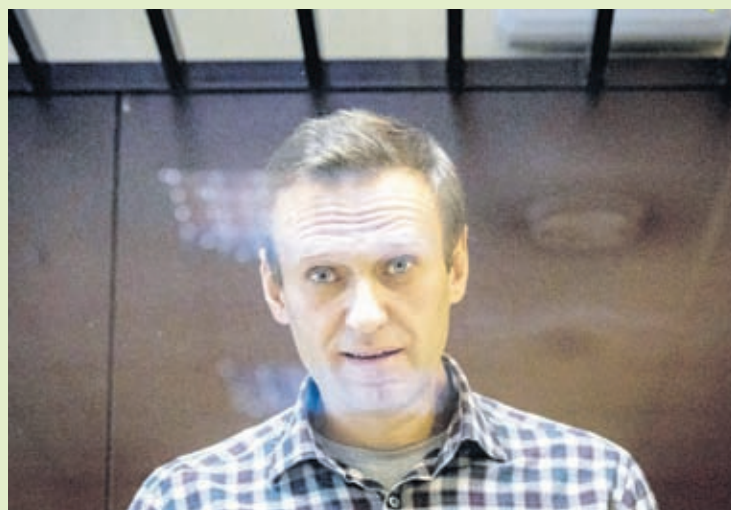
The Kremlin-controlled lower house, the State Duma, quickly endorsed the bill in a crucial second reading. After three readings, it would need to be approved by the upper house and signed by President Vladimir Putin to become law.

Lawmakers are considering the bill while Moscow

prosecutors have moved to designate Navalny's Foundation for Fighting Corruption and his regional offices as extremist groups. Navalny and his allies have

denounced the proceedings as a move to stifle critical voices before September's parliamentary election.

Navalny's regional "head-



In this Saturday, Feb. 20, 2021 file photo, Russian opposition leader Alexei Navalny looks at photographers standing in the Babuskinsky District Court in Moscow, Russia.

Associated Press

quarters," as his team called them, have been instrumental in implementing the Smart Voting strategy a project designed to promote candidates who are most likely to defeat those from the Kremlin's dominant United Russia party in various elections.

The new bill that received the tentative approval Tuesday is widely seen as part of Kremlin efforts to keep any Navalny associates and allies from September's ballot.

Navalny, who is Putin's most adamant critic, was arrested in January upon returning from Germany, where he spent five months recovering from a nerve agent poisoning that he blames on the Kremlin

accusations that Russian officials reject. In February, Navalny received a 2 1/2-year prison sentence for violating the terms of a suspended sentence from a 2014 embezzlement conviction that Navalny has rejected as politically motivated.

In remarks posted Tuesday on his Instagram account, Navalny said Russian investigators had told him about three new criminal probes against him. He ridiculed the accusations, which he said lacked any basis.

"My powerful criminal syndicate is growing," he said in acerbic comments, noting that 21 investigators have been assigned to investigate his alleged wrongdoing. □

Threats mount up against top European beauty spot in Hungary

By JUSTIN SPIKE

Associated Press

SZIGLIGET, Hungary (AP) —

Fishermen in small, wooden boats drift among the reeds and placid waters of Lake Balaton, the largest lake in Central Europe and one of Hungary's natural treasures. Like many of the villages dotted along the shoreline of what is popularly known as the "Hungarian sea," the quaint village of Szigliget has against the odds maintained and nurtured its traditional character for centuries.

Its towering fortress, white-washed peasant homes and small vineyards on gentle slopes have remained virtually unchanged despite two world wars, 45 years of Communism, and Hungary's transition to a market economy.

New and formidable threats are looming, however. Real estate speculation, clearance of the countryside to improve access for tourists and climate change are combining to cast a shadow over this whole area.

Many of the lake's settlements have already fallen prey to speculative property development. The mayor of Szigliget, Daniel Balassa, says a recent surge of con-



Lake Balaton in Csopak, Hungary on May 18, 2021. Lake Balaton is the largest lake in Central Europe and one of Hungary's most cherished natural treasures.

struction makes him fear his village's idyllic atmosphere could soon make it the next target. "We don't need huge buildings here, or for the whole shoreline to be built upon. We have a beach and a marina, we don't need anything else," Balassa told The Associated Press beside a reed bed on the lakeshore.

The lake is nearly 50 miles (80 kilometers) long and has 120 miles (200 kilometers) of shoreline. With its

silty bottom and shallow waters the average depth is only about 10 feet (3 meters) the lake is home to a delicate ecology that provides a seasonal destination for a variety of migratory birds.

But Hungary's government views the lake as a potential goldmine for domestic and international tourism.

In 2016, it designated the region as a priority tourism development area, and earmarked 365 billion forints

(\$1.27 billion) of Hungarian and European Union funds for railroad improvements, roads, marinas and the renovation and construction of hotels and guesthouses. According to the Hungarian Tourism Agency, 232 such projects have been undertaken in 56 settlements in recent years.

"There is huge destruction of the environment. Trees are being cut and good quality reeds are disappearing, threatening the

whole ecosystem," Angela Badzso, co-chair of citizens' action group Unity for the Balaton, told the AP.

The reeds serve to maintain a healthy balance in the water and ensure a vibrant habitat.

"As the reeds are disappearing, they are less able to filter Lake Balaton's water. This is one of the reasons why algae growth is higher and fish die," Badzso says.

Zoltan Kun, a conservationist and environmental protection expert, said that while Balaton's water quality has significantly improved since the 1990s, the decreased reed coverage threatens to throw the complex ecosystem into imbalance. "The unfortunate truth in Hungary ... is that we measure the success of development in the square meters of concrete, rather than the number of certain birds or square meters of reeds around the lake," Kun said.

After Hungary's Prime Minister Viktor Orban and his ruling Fidesz party took power in 2010, the government dissolved the country's environmental protection ministry. Kun says that significantly reduced the state's ability to look after its natural resources. □

Crew evacuated after explosion on container ship off Colombo

By BHARATHA MALLA-WARACHI

Associated Press

COLOMBO, Sri Lanka

(AP) — An explosion occurred Tuesday on a ship anchored near Sri Lanka's capital on which a fire had been burning for several days, prompting the crew's evacuation, officials said.

The container vessel MV X-Press Pearl was anchored about 9.5 nautical miles (18 kilometers) northwest of Colombo and waiting to enter its port when the fire erupted four days ago, the Sri Lankan navy said.

It said it believes the fire was caused by chemicals being transported on the

Singapore-flagged ship. The ship was carrying 1,486 containers, including 25 tons of nitric acid and other chemicals which it loaded at the port of Hazira, India, on May 15, it said.

The vessel's 25-member crew includes Philippine, Chinese, Indian and Russian nationals.

Navy spokesman Capt. Indika de Silva said crew members and salvage and firefighting experts evacuated the ship after the explosion. Several containers also tumbled into the sea, he said.

Aerial photos released by Sri Lanka's air force showed the vessel engulfed in flames and thick smoke.

High winds intensified the blaze, Silva said.

Five tugboats were engaged in firefighting efforts and a navy ship was anchored nearby to help them, Silva said.

X-Press Feeders, which owns and operates the ship, confirmed the crew was safe and said it would work closely with Sri Lankan authorities and emergency services to extinguish the blaze and save the vessel and its cargo.

"Specialized firefighting equipment which arrived from Europe last night will join the salvaging operations," it said in a statement on its website. □



In this photo provided by Sri Lanka Air Force, smoke rises from the container vessel MV X-Press Pearl engulfed in flames off Colombo port, Sri Lanka, Tuesday, May 25, 2021.

Associated Press

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Covid-19: the status on Aruba

ORANJESTAD —Rules and protocols are being reviewed and evaluated on a daily basis and adapted as per current situation by a crisis team, in order to protect each and every one visiting and residing our island.

Current numbers

There are currently 69 active Covid cases on the island. 57 residents and 12 non-residents. There are 14 persons hospitalized of which 4 of them are in the Intensive care unit. 107 persons lost their battle against the Covid virus of which 1 of them is a non-resident. A total of 162.128 persons have been tested of which 11.441 were tested at the airport. 62% of the total population have been vaccinated. Aiming for 85% of the total population by end of June 2021.

Measurement by the Government of Aruba

Valid as of Tuesday May 25th, 2021 until further notice.

- There will be no more curfew.
- Closing time for businesses is 11pm.
- Casino's are allowed to stay open till 1am
- Max eight (8) per table indoors & max ten (10) per table outdoors

(excluding children under the age of 12) Tables must be at least 1.5 meters apart.

- During live performance 5 musicians are allowed to perform on stage.
- No musical events that are intended to attract customers.
- Background music is allowed/No dancing.
- Hotels and lodgings are exempted from the closing time, BUT only to serve their registered guests.
- There is no more public gathering ban but people must still wear masks and social distance when required.
- Alcohol is no longer restricted on public beaches, but alcohol at parking lots and roads are not allowed.
- There will be no more ban on public beaches after 7.30pm, however ban on parking lots are still in effect after 7.30pm.
- Masks are still mandatory and must be worn at all times indoors and when using public transportation.

More information on travel and health requirements can be found on www.aruba.com. □

Aruba to me is....

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cation picture while enjoying our Happy Island.

Complete the sentence:

Aruba to me is Send your picture with that text (including your name and where you are from) to:





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our free newspaper, we strive to make you a happy reader every day again. □

For today we received a wonderful picture from Terry Christopher directly from Lansdowne Pennsylvania saying:

"Aruba to me is unadulterated joy...effortless oneness with nature, the sea and the human spirit. Aruba to me is a place that most accurately depicts rewards for a life of hard work."

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Papillon restaurant: The butterfly effect of magnificent food

PALM BEACH — Do you remember the film “Papillon” starring Steve McQueen? Papillon restaurant is the island’s example where ‘life imitates art.’ The décor, especially the restrooms, was inspired by the movie. For more than a decade this restaurant has built a reputation with the fusion of classic French cuisine, Dutch and Caribbean flavors. Welcome in the world of wonders where ambiance, taste and service come together and you feel you are being welcomed in the home of the owner and her team.

“We find it really important that our guests have fun; can relax while listening to live music while their taste buds are being tickled by France, The Netherlands and the Caribbean. We offer a unique fusion of dishes and a night not to forget,” says owner Tina. She points out that all Covid-protocol is in place here, they are very keen on hygiene and offer outside dining on a cozy, elegant terrace with social distancing in place and right on the high-rise strip.

Now: Early Bird & Live Music

New rules with regards to the Covid-19 situation will not prevent us from offering you a wonderful, gastronomic night. Papillon knows how to fly high and rises to the occasion with a beautiful combo of three courses including a glass of wine for only \$ 32 per person. This Early Bird is on from 5pm to 7pm. It gets even better with live entertainment by the local star Marisela, praised for her amazing voice which she will bring to you on Mondays and Fridays. The talented tunes of Jairo’s saxophone enchant you on Tuesdays and Thursdays and each Saturday Venezuelan born musician Jose Herrera will show you why his name is established on the island and in Europe.

Oysters, caviar and wild boar

You are on vacation, life is to enjoy! If you want something special, a different flow than the usual then Papillon is the place to go. Foodies are in heaven here with classic French dishes such as Foie Gras, Frog Legs, fresh Oysters coming in on a weekly basis with KLM, Escargots, Dover Sole à la Meunière flown in from Europe and filleted at the table, Duck Breast seared on the skin, roasted and braised Lamb in Balashi beer and slow braised Wild Boar Shank. Do not leave without trying the exclusive recommendation: Caviar! All of this combined with an extensive wine list from around the world makes Papillon a must-do on your Aruban vacation.

Tina: “Our chef is from Peru and at the moment we have the renowned guest chef Griet Vanbrabant who worked in Michelin star restaurants like El Bulli in Spain which happened to be the world’s best restaurant for many years and Pujol in Mexico. So this is the time to come over and reserve your table.”

Vegetarian vibes present

Impressive vegetarian/vegan dishes are set up especially for the guests by the chef and Meredith from Vegan Aruba. “We offer vegan choices that are really good and tasty. Our daily soup is always vegan too.” What are you waiting for, make sure to pay a visit to this elegant yet laid-back restaurant while on Aruba. You are most welcome! Papillon Restaurant is located at The Village across the Hilton Aruba Caribbean Resort & Casino and within walking distance of all other major hotels.

Make your reservation today at:

info@papillonaruba.com

or call/WhatsApp + 00297 699 5400

Open Daily: 5pm – 9pm- Last seating at 7.30pm

For all menus and specials visit the website: www.papillonaruba.com.



Papillon
RESTAURANT



Consumer Price Index, base period June 2019 April 2021

ORANJESTAD — The Central Bureau of Statistics presents the most important findings for the Consumer Price Index (CPI) for the month of April 2021.

Consumer Price Index for the month of April 2021

The CPI for April 2021 is 97.57, a decrease of 0.02% compared to the index of March 2021 (97.59) and accumulating an increase of 0.5% up to and including April of this year. The percentage change of the CPI over the last twelve (12) months (April 2020 to April 2021) is -0.4, an increase of 0.5 percentage points (ppts) compared to the percentage change for the same period of last year (-0.9%). The period average percentage change of the CPI for the period April 2020 - April 2021 is -2.3%, a decrease of 5.5 ppts compared to the period average percentage change over the period April 2019 - April 2020 (3.2%). During this month, five (5) of the twelve (12) sectors registered decreases in prices. The decreases that had the greatest influence on the CPI were registered for the "Household operation" (-2.6%) and "Recreation and culture" (-1.8%) sectors, which contributed with an effect of -0.24 and -0.18 ppts. The decreases in the remaining sectors had an effect of -0.16 ppts on the CPI of April 2021. Aforementioned decreases were partially offset mainly by increases in the indices for the "Transport" (2.4%) and

"Housing" (0.7%) sectors, causing an effect of 0.31 and 0.17 ppts, respectively. The increases in the remaining sectors had an effect of 0.08 ppts on the CPI of April 2021. The decrease in the "Household operation" sector was mainly due to a decrease in the category "Household appliances" (-9.7%), which contributed to an effect of -0.26 ppts. The decrease in the "Recreation and culture" sector was mainly due to a decrease in the category "Audio-visual, photographic and information processing equipment" (-22.8%), which contributed to an effect of -0.15 ppts. The increase in the "Transport" sector was mainly due to an increase in the category "Operation of personal transport equipment" (3.7%), which contributed to an effect of 0.28 ppts. The increase in the "Housing" sector was caused by an increase of 3.0% in the category "Maintenance and repair of the dwelling", which contributed to an effect of 0.16 ppts.

Consumption basket

The consumption basket of the CPI consists of 408 goods and services. Compared to March 2021, 34.6% of these products had an increase in price, causing an effect of 0.81 ppts, while 47.1% showed a decrease, contributing to an effect of -0.83 ppts and the remaining 18.4% had no change in price. The prices of goods decreased by 0.03% and caused an

influence of -0.02 ppts. The prices of services showed a slight decrease of 0.01% and had an insignificant influence on the CPI of April 2021.

Core inflation

The CPIC (core inflation) - CPI excluding the effect of energy and food - was -1.4% in April 2021. The energy index - which consists of the products: electricity, water, gasoline and diesel - was -6.1%. The food index showed a decrease of -2.6%.

Subsistence level

The subsistence level for a household consisting of two (2) adults and two (2) children (aged 0-15 years) in April 2021 is Afl. 4,750, a decrease of Afl. 71 compared to April 2020 (Afl. 4,821). The subsistence level for a single adult household is Afl. 2,262, a decrease of Afl. 34 compared to April 2020 (Afl. 2,296).

Change in prices of crude oil, utilities, gasoline and diesel in April 2021

The prices of utilities (electricity and water), gasoline and diesel are for the greater part determined by international crude oil prices. In April 2021 the average price per barrel of crude oil (US\$ 61.52) had a decrease of US\$ 1.10 (-1.8%) compared to March 2021 (US\$ 62.62). The prices of electricity and water did not change compared to March 2021. Subsequently, the average electricity price per household re-

mained at Afl. 240.09, while the average price of water per household remained at Afl. 137.05. In April 2021 the price of gasoline registered an increase of Afl. 12.82 cents (6.1%) and had an effect of 0.27 ppts on the CPI. The price of diesel registered an increase of Afl. 4.90 cents (2.9%) and had an effect of 0.01 ppt on the CPI of April 2021. In April 2021, utilities, gasoline and diesel as a group showed an increase in price of 1.7% compared to March 2021, and had an influence of 0.28 ppts on the CPI, while the remaining 404 goods and services, as a group, show a decrease of 0.4% and had an effect of -0.30 ppts on the CPI.

Change in prices of Food & catering services in April 2021

The "Food & catering services" index showed an increase of 0.3% in April 2021, after declining in each of the six previous months. The index for "Food at home" showed an increase of 0.5% in April, as seven (7) of the eleven (11) "Food at home" indices increased in April 2021. The "Potatoes and other tubers" index registered the largest increase (1.7%) in April 2021. Furthermore, increases were posted in the indices for "Meat" (1.2%), "Vegetables" (0.8%), "Bread and cereals" (0.6%) and "Milk, cheese and eggs" (0.5%). The "Sugar, jam, honey and other confectionery" (-0.5%) index registered the largest decrease in



April 2021. Furthermore, decreases were posted in the indices for "Nonalcoholic beverages" (-0.3%), "Oils and fats" (-0.2%) and "Fruit" (-0.2%). Over the last twelve (12) months, the "Food & catering services" has decreased by 1.6%. The "Food at home" index showed a decrease of 2.5%. The "Potatoes and other tubers" index decreased by 11.7%, the largest decrease among the "Food at home" food groups, while the "Sugar, jam, honey and other confectionery" index increased by 0.8%, the only increase among the "Food at home" food groups. The index for "Food away from home" decreased by 0.02% in April 2021 and has increased by 0.5% over the last twelve (12) months. In April 2021, "Food at home" and "Food away from home" as a group showed an increase in price of 0.3% compared to March 2021, and had an influence of 0.05 ppts on the CPI, while the remaining goods and services, as a group, experienced a decrease in price of 0.1%, causing an effect of -0.07 ppts on the CPI.

For more information visit www.cbs.aw. □

Defense station ship returned: anti-drug operations resumed

SAVANETA — The navy ship Zr. Ms. Holland will arrive in



Curaçao today. This means that the Caribbean once again has an operational patrol ship at its disposal. With a salute from Fort Krommelijn, the ship is ceremonially brought in by the Commander of the Navy in the Caribbean. HNLMS Holland will stay in the Caribbean for at least six months.

The ship will be patrolling the Caribbean Sea intensively in the coming months. There she is used for anti-drug operations, enforce-

ment in arms smuggling and human trafficking, as well as for any hurricane emergency relief within or outside the Kingdom. The ship will also sail for the Coast Guard, and will also be involved in enforcing environmental regulations, for example when it comes to (illegal) fishing. The new station ship is an Oceangoing Patrol Vessel of the Holland class. HNLMS Holland was last active as a station ship in the Caribbean in the spring of 2018. The

ship also has an NH90 maritime combat helicopter on board which, together with the station ship, can conduct search and rescue operations. With the presence of the station ship, the armed forces fulfill their constitutional tasks, such as maintaining the international legal order. The previous station ship, Zr. Ms. Groningen, managed to book a record drug seizures of five times in one month. □

Millennial Money: Set your strategy for Memorial Day sales

By **COURTNEY JESPERSEN** of **NerdWallet**

Last Memorial Day, Americans were dizzy from the pandemic, recession and widespread shutdowns. Many had shopping for hand sanitizer and toilet paper on the brain. But this May, life seems to be blooming again ahead of the unofficial start of summer. And in more typical Memorial Day fashion, the weekend leading up to May 31 will be filled with sales on appliances, apparel and travel plus a few new categories, too. Here's where to find the deals and how to save.

SOME OLD, SOME NEW NORMAL

Retailers have a few go-to Memorial Day product categories. The day is traditionally marked with substantial discounts on household items like laundry appliances, kitchen appliances and mattresses. That'll be true again this year, and some promotions have already started. But in 2021 in particular, some of the sales will also be targeted to the activities Americans care about during the ongoing pandemic and gradual reopening. Think barbecues in the backyard, socially distanced camping trips and home improvement projects.



Shoppers exit a retail store in downtown Chicago, Ill., Saturday, May 22, 2021.

Associated Press

"We'll be shopping for apparel because we'll be seeing more people this summer than we did last summer," says Barbara Stewart, professor and coordinator of retailing and consumer science at the University of Houston. "I think consumers are also ready to do some traveling because we've been at home for more than a year," she says. Add road trip supplies, car maintenance, camping gear, hotel rooms and domestic airfare to the list of Memorial Day markdowns. After all, businesses can

access word searches to see what consumers are searching for online. Retailers often align sales to match trending categories and in turn encourage spending, says Priya Raghuram, Dean Abraham L. Gitlow professor of business at New York University Stern School of Business. "What really gets people over that last threshold from interest in a category to, 'Here's my credit card. Charge it,' is a financial incentive like a price promotion," she says. These types of Memorial

Day sales will happen both online and in stores, but don't expect malls to be as crowded as they were once upon a time.

BRAINSTORM BEFORE THE BARGAINS

Whether you head to a physical store or a virtual one, there are at least three guaranteed ways to save money on Memorial Day. First, before you start sifting through any sales, make a list of the things you know you want to buy. That way, the scope of your search isn't influenced by the products you're seeing.

"Make a list now when you're in a cool frame of mind about things you might be interested in purchasing if they go on sale, rather than having that list be created by what's on sale," Raghuram says.

If the products you want to buy don't go on sale, refrain from purchasing things that weren't on your list simply to fill the shopping void.

TRY ALL TYPES OF STORES

Next, as you begin combing through sale ads and websites, keep your options and browser tabs open. Memorial Day sales are the bread and butter of big-box stores, department stores, mattress stores, home improvement stores and travel agencies. But you'll also find savings at less obvious outlets, such as dollar stores, according to Stewart.

Budget retailers can be an especially good fit for products you'll only use for a limited time, such as pool toys that you'll throw away at the end of the season anyway.

REMEMBER YOUR BUDGET

As is true for any shopping excursion, set a limit for what you're willing to (and comfortably able to) spend over the holiday weekend. A budget can rein in any potential impulse spending. □

Mexico to buy Shell share of Texas refinery for \$600 million

MEXICO CITY (AP) — Mexico said Monday it will buy Shell's 50% share in the jointly owned Deer Park refinery near Houston for

about \$600 million. The move comes as part of President Andrés Manuel López Obrador's central policy to build, acquire or

renovate oil refineries, in an era when most countries are trying to reduce their reliance on fossil fuels.

"We are going to stop buying fuel abroad ... we will become self sufficient by 2023," said López Obrador, who is spending about \$9 billion to build a similar-size new refinery in his home state of Tabasco.

In a statement, Shell wrote that "Shell Chemical LP will continue to operate its 100% owned Deer Park Chemicals facility located adjacent to the site."

"Shell did not plan to market its interest in the Deer Park refinery," said Huibert Vigeveno, Shell's Downstream Director.

"However, following an unsolicited offer from Pemex, we have reached an agreement to transfer our interest in the partnership to them."

The Mexican president had complained recently that Deer Park had not yielded any benefits for Mexico since 1993, apparently because most of the profits had been reinvested.

But he acknowledged the refinery does process 340,000 barrels of crude per day, much of that Mexican crude.

The state-owned Pemex oil company pledged to operate the plant in an environmentally responsible way.

López Obrador sees the oil industry as key to both the nation's sovereignty and its economic future, and has enacted rules limiting renewable energies like wind and solar power.

Critics say it is a nostalgic position that harkens back to the 1970s, when oil was king in the Gulf coast state of Tabasco, and makes little sense with the world's growing shift to renewables.

While \$600 million for half a refinery appears to be a good deal for Mexico, it also raises questions about the wisdom of the country's decision to invest \$9 billion to build a similar, new facility. □



In this Aug. 31, 2017, file photo, a flame burns at the Shell Deer Park oil refinery in Deer Park, Texas.

Associated Press

CROSSWORD

By THOMAS JOSEPH

ACROSS 45 Macramé unit

1 Rum-soaked cake

5 Keyboard bar

11 Spoken

12 Mysterious

13 Casino cubes

14 Whirlpool

15 Shaggy ox

16 Made baskets

17 Put away

19 Punch sound

22 Submerged

24 Tennis star

26 Swift horse

27 Throw in the towel

28 Artist Albers

30 Quests

31 Sturdy wood

32 In the lead

34 Russian ruler

35 Texas's Houston

38 Get

41 Hidden mic

42 Lumber work

43 Look lewdly

44 Plug parts

DOWN

1 Anatomy subject

2 Verdi creation

3 URL part

4 Brewpub order

5 Relish

6 Shown to be true

7 Plot size

8 Purr producer

9 Hydrocarbon suffix

10 Writer Stout

16 "Holy smokes!"

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Yesterday's answer

- | | |
|---------------------------|-----------------------|
| 18 Start of a Hamlet line | 30 That woman |
| 19 Hashtag part | 33 Puts up |
| 20 Leave out | 34 Abel's brother |
| 21 Funny folks | 36 Singer Guthrie |
| 22 Mexican peninsula | 37 Get together |
| 23 Winged archer | 38 African cobra |
| 25 Blue hue | 39 Sea rover |
| 29 Disconcerting | 40 First prime number |
| | 41 Stir-fry pan |

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44							45			

5-26

A X Y D L B A A X R
is LONGFELLOW

One letter stands for another. In this sample, A is used for the three L's, X for the two O's, etc. Single letters, apostrophes, the length and formation of the words are all hints. Each day the code letters are different.

5-26

CRYPTOQUOTE

LRKOT LRKPCE. QHER LRKOT
BQDTNE HU CLR EFL. KPR
SREC PRQHRORN SI CLR
QRCCHUZ DY K QHCCQR XKCRP.

— BLPHECDJLRP GDPQRI

Yesterday's Cryptoquote: I'VE ALWAYS HAD A DUCK PERSONALITY. CALM ABOVE WATER. FEET GOING CRAZY BELOW. — K. FLAY

Who's an astronaut as private spaceflight picks up speed?



In this Monday, March 29, 2021 photo provided by SpaceX, from left, Jared Isaacman, Hayley Arceneaux, Sian Proctor and Chris Sembroski pose for a photo on the SpaceX launch tower at NASA's Kennedy Space Center at Cape Canaveral, Fla.

Associated Press

By MARCIA DUNN
AP Aerospace Writer

CAPE CANAVERAL, Fla. (AP) — As more companies start selling tickets to space, a question looms: Who gets to call themselves an astronaut?

It's already a complicated issue and about to get more so as the wealthy snap up spacecraft seats and even entire flights for themselves and their entourages.

Astronauts? Amateur astronauts? Space tourists? Space sightseers? Rocket riders? Or as the Russians have said for decades, spaceflight participants?

NASA's new boss Bill Nelson doesn't consider himself an astronaut even though he spent six days orbiting Earth in 1986 aboard space shuttle Columbia as a congressman.

"I reserve that term for my professional colleagues," Nelson recently told The Associated Press.

Computer game developer Richard Garriott who paid his way to the International Space Station in 2008 with the Russians hates the space tourist label. "I am an astronaut," he declared in an email, explaining that he trained for two years for the mission.

"If you go to space, you're an astronaut," said Axiom Space's Michael Lopez-Alegria, a former NASA astronaut who will accompany three businessmen to the space station in January, flying SpaceX. His \$55 million-a-seat clients plan to conduct research up there, he stressed, and do not consider themselves space tourists. On Tuesday, Axiom Space announced a second flight for next year that will be led by the company's Peggy Whitson, a retired NASA astronaut who's spent 665 days in space, more than any other American.

Her No. 2 will be businessman-turned-race car driver John Shoffner, of Knoxville, Tennessee, who's also paying around \$55 million. "I've asked Peggy to throw the book at me in training. Make me an astronaut," he said.

There's something enchanting about the word: Astronaut comes from the Greek words for star and sailor. And swashbuckling images of "The Right Stuff" and NASA's original Mercury 7 astronauts make for great marketing.

Jeff Bezos' rocket company, Blue Origin, is already calling its future clients "astronauts." It's auctioning off one seat on its first spaceflight with people on board, targeted for July. NASA even has a new acronym: PAM for Private Astronaut Mission. Retired NASA astronaut Mike Mullane didn't consider himself an astronaut until his first space shuttle flight in 1984, six years after his selection by NASA.

"It doesn't matter if you buy a ride or you're assigned to a ride," said Mullane, whose 2006 autobiography is titled "Riding Rockets." Until you strap into a rocket and reach a certain altitude, "you're not an astronaut."

It remains a coveted assignment. More than 12,000 applied for NASA's upcoming class of astronauts; a lucky dozen or so will be selected in December.

But what about passengers who are along for the ride, like the Russian actress and movie director who will fly to the space station in October? Or Japan's moon-struck billionaire who will follow them from Kazakhstan in December with his production assistant tagging along to document everything? In each case, a professional cosmonaut will be in charge of the Soyuz capsule. □

Classifieds

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650
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30 weeks remain on each
Price : \$8,5 K each
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johnnypaesch@gmail.com

Dutch Village

Studio week 19 room #72
35 weeks remain to use in 6
Years
Price :\$ 4 K
Call: 011-297-630-1307
johnnypaesch@gmail.com

Divi Village Resort

1 BR WK # 23 Room # 3504
1 BR WK # 24 Room # 3202
13 weeks remain on each
Price : \$ \$ 7K each or \$13 K
both
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johnnypaesch@gmail.com

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Harbor / Ocean View
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Call: 011-297-630-1307
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Writer Paul Rudnick scores with a witty, regal romance novel

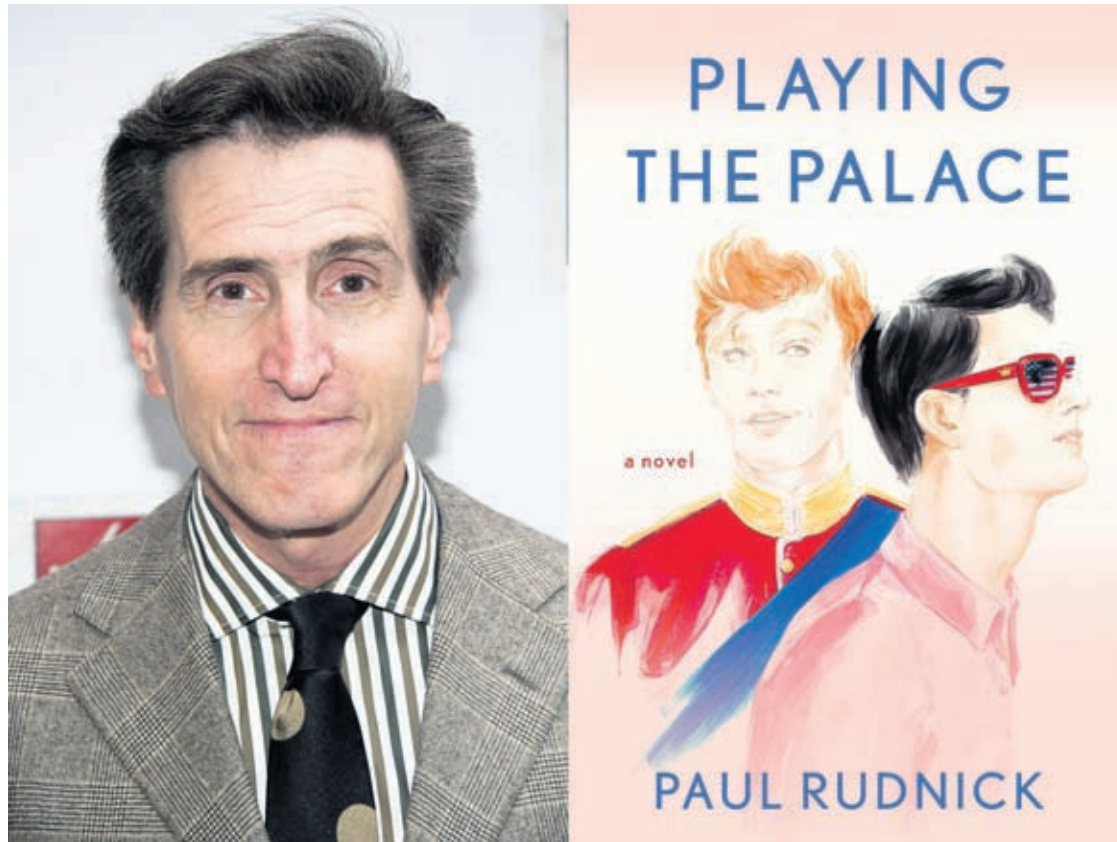
By **MARK KENNEDY**

AP Entertainment Writer

NEW YORK (AP) — Paul Rudnick has written a romantic comedy with a royal twist. In "Playing the Palace," the playwright, screenwriter and novelist has a witty, engaging book about two unlikely lovers: A Jewish man from New Jersey and the crown prince of England. "I've never written an all-out romantic comedy like this," says Rudnick, who put the finishing touches to the manuscript during the pandemic. "It was so much fun to live in that world and to just try a complete celebration without a whole lot of trauma."

"Playing the Palace" is told from the slightly insecure perspective of Carter Ogden, a unhappily single associate event architect "barreling toward 30" who adores Ruth Bader Ginsberg and IHOP. He believes that New York's St. Patrick's Cathedral being located between a Tiffany's and a Saks is "a sign of God's admiration for high-end retail." His chance meeting with the drop-dead gorgeous Prince Edgar, the Prince of Wales, triggers a romance with international implications and tons of snarky tabloid headlines. Can these two very different men make it?

"I'm a Jewish guy from New Jersey. I thought, 'OK, that's about as far away from the royal family as you can



This combination of photos shows writer Paul Rudnick at the opening night performance of the Broadway revival of Arthur Miller's "Death of a Salesman" in New York on March 15, 2012, left, and the cover image for his new book "Playing the Palace."

Associated Press

get,' which made it sound like the most fun," says Rudnick. "I also wanted a story about people of wildly different social status."

Rudnick shares in the overwhelming fascination with the British royal family and weaves in references to Brexit, Buckingham Palace and "The Great British Bake Off." "What I really love about Paul is that he gives such specificity to his characters so that even if he's making them larger to life, they still feel very human and relatable be-

cause it's the details that really bring them to life," said Cindy Hwang, his editor at Berkley, an imprint of Penguin Random House. The book arrives on a wave of interest in the royals, especially in Prince Harry and his biracial American wife, Meghan, who are redefining who belongs in the House of Windsor.

"It just felt like there was something in the air," says Rudnick. "There was sort of a sense of inevitability that, 'OK, the royal family is progressing and this sort of

romance is becoming far more possible.'"

Rudnick's plays include "Jeffrey" and "I Hate Hamlet." His screenplays include "Sister Act," "Addams Family Values," "Jeffrey" and "In & Out." With the new book, he painted a cheerfully progressive, LGBTQ-respecting world.

"There are so many completely valid and very necessary stories of prejudice against gay people and the trauma of coming out and family oppression," he says. "But there also needs

to be a balance of completely joyous queer love stories and stories about people who are wildly and openly gay and that's just a given." The book is not the first to portray a same-sex American-British royal love — think "Red, White & Royal Blue" — but it sparkles with Rudnick's take, and his publisher hopes it attracts a large audience.

"We really do feel like a lot of different kinds of people can enjoy this book for a lot of different reasons. Obviously, a traditional romance reader, yes," Hwang said. "But a lot of people who don't really read romance I think would really enjoy this book." Rudnick approached the sex scenes in the same way he did the rest of the novel, with humor and heart. "I think sex scenes in any book can get very clunky and very embarrassing. And you want to avoid the cringe factor," he says. "In romance books, they can sometimes be absolutely pornographic or they can be completely only vaguely suggestive. I wanted to land somewhere in between the two."

Rudnick also uses the figure of Edgar — a witty, charming self-aware royal who jokes privately "I could have you beheaded" — to explore the isolating nature of mega-fame and the expectations put on pioneering gay figures. □

'Hadestown' jumps ahead of pack to welcome Broadway patrons



A woman walks past the Walter Kerr Theatre, Thursday, May 6, 2021, in New York where Hadestown was showing before the coronavirus pandemic forced its closing a year ago. Gov. Andrew Cuomo has announced that Broadway theaters can reopen Sept. 14, 2021.

Associated Press

By **MARK KENNEDY**

AP Entertainment Writer

NEW YORK (AP) — "Hadestown," the brooding

musical about the underworld, has set its Broadway reopening date on Sept. 2, jumping ahead of such megahits as "Hamilton" and "Wicked" to position itself as the first show to welcome audiences on Broadway since the pandemic. Producers announced Monday that tickets will go on sale June 11 for the eight-time Tony Award winning musical and that the production will resume playing the Walter Kerr Theatre weeks before its rivals. The first Broadway show to welcome a live audience

is likely to get a lot of attention. New York Gov. Andrew Cuomo had said Broadway theaters could reopen Sept. 14 but producers "may make their own economic decision as to when they reopen." They also will be allowed to decide their own entry requirements, like whether people must prove they've been vaccinated to attend a show. Soon thereafter, "Hamilton," "Wicked" and "The Lion King" announced they would restart their shows Sept. 14, as did the long-running revival of "Chicago" and

the new "Lackawanna Blues." Others have staked out spots further into fall and winter, including "Six" and David Byrne's "American Utopia" for Sept. 17 and "Dear Evan Hansen" in December. Some off-Broadway shows have already restarted with social distancing guidelines. The Broadway that reopens will look different. The big budget Disney musical "Frozen" decided not to reopen when Broadway theaters restart and producers of the musical "Mean Girls" also decided not to return. □

Green Bay QB Rodgers doesn't attend Packers' 1st day of OTAs

By **STEVE MEGARGEE**
AP Sports Writer

Green Bay Packers quarterback Aaron Rodgers wasn't present for the first day of organized team activities Monday, and his future with the team remains uncertain.

Rodgers confirmed in an ESPN interview that he wasn't at Monday's session. Although these OTAs are voluntary, Rodgers generally has participated in them in the past.

Rodgers' decision to stay away comes amid reports that the reigning MVP wants out of Green Bay, where he has spent his entire NFL career. Rodgers was noncommittal about his future during his ESPN interview, but did detail some of his frustrations.

"I think sometimes people forget what really makes an organization," Rodgers said. "History is important, the legacy of so many people who've come before you. But the people, that's the most important thing. People make an organization. People make a business, and sometimes that gets forgotten. Culture is built brick by brick, the foundation of it by the people, not by the organi-



In this Jan. 3, 2021, file photo, Green Bay Packers head coach Matt LaFleur, left, talks to Aaron Rodgers during the second half of an NFL football game against the Chicago Bears in Chicago. Associated Press

zation, not by the building, not by the corporation. It's built by the people."

ESPN reported in the hours before the draft that the three-time MVP doesn't want to return to the Packers. Later that week, Packers CEO Mark Murphy wrote in a column posted on the Packers' website that the team "is very much aware" of Rodgers' concerns and that "this is an issue that we have been working on for

several months."

Murphy acknowledged in his column that he, general manager Brian Gutekunst and coach Matt LaFleur all had visited Rodgers on a number of occasions during this offseason.

Gutekunst has said the team has no plans to trade Rodgers, who has three years remaining on his contract. Packers officials have said they want to keep Rodgers in Green Bay in

2021 and beyond.

"We want him back in the worst way," LaFleur said earlier this month during the team's rookie minicamp. "I know he knows that and, you know, we'll continue to work at it each and every day."

Rodgers' long-term future has been a subject of major speculation across the NFL ever since the Packers traded up four spots in the first round to select Utah

State quarterback Jordan Love with the 26th overall pick in the 2020 draft.

The Packers didn't notify Rodgers beforehand about their plans to select a quarterback in the first round. Rodgers said less than a month later that the Packers' decision to draft Love surprised him and complicated his hopes of finishing his career in Green Bay.

"With my situation, look it's never been about the draft pick, picking Jordan," Rodgers told ESPN. "I love Jordan. He's a great kid, a lot of fun to work together. Love the coaching staff, love my teammates, love the fan base in Green Bay. An incredible 16 years.

"It's just kind of about a philosophy and maybe forgetting that it is about the people that make the thing go. It's about character, it's about culture, it's about doing things the right way. A lot of this was put in motion last year and the wrench was just kind of thrown into it when I won MVP and played the way I played last year. This is just kind of, I think, a spill-out of all that. But it is about the people, and that's the most important thing." □

Virus positives play role in first round of NHL playoffs

By **STEPHEN WHYNO**
AP Hockey Writer

Players testing positive for the coronavirus late in the regular season and at the start of the playoffs affected multiple teams around the NHL despite a high rate of vaccinations.

The St. Louis Blues were swept in the first round by Colorado after three players who said they were vaccinated against COVID-19 tested positive, landed on the league's protocol list and were unavailable. Blues leading scorer David Perron said Tuesday he and forward Nathan Walker were vaccinated before each tested positive; the team said defenseman Jake Walman was fully vaccinated and re-testing came back positive for the virus, sending

him into quarantine. The Washington Capitals lost to Boston in five games after Evgeny Kuznetsov and Ilya Samsonov missed time for mandatory quarantine despite neither experiencing any symptoms. Kuznetsov and Samsonov said they had COVID-19 earlier in the season, when they were out for several weeks.

"The rules (say) if you tested positive for COVID, then they retest the test and if it (came back) positive you have to quarantine for 10 days," Kuznetsov said Tuesday.

"Then you go for (a) physical couple days, then you can skate with the team after 14 days. So, I mean, that is basically what was happened."

The defending Stanley Cup champion Tampa Bay

Lightning are the only team so far to confirm fully vaccinated status.

The NHL last week investigated testing irregularities that led to multiple false positives for the Blues and Vegas Golden Knights and found it to be a laboratory error. Vegas coach Peter DeBoer said his team had nine false positives in one day.

After 51 regular-season games were postponed, none have had to be pushed back so far in the playoffs. The only potential scare was Game 2 between Colorado and St. Louis, which went ahead after a league investigation.

"You are always worried about false positives, but that's been a concern all year long and doesn't re-



St. Louis Blues' David Perron (57) celebrates with Ryan O'Reilly (90), Torey Krug (47), Mike Hoffman (68) and Brayden Schenn (10) after scoring his second goal of the night, during the third period of an NHL hockey game against the Minnesota Wild, Thursday, May 13, 2021 in St. Louis. The Blues erased a 3-0 deficit to win 7-3.

Associated Press

ally relate to vaccinated status," Daly said in an email. "I would imagine the

concern has decreased significantly in a more vaccinated environment." □

Never No. 1, Mickelson's legacy will be longevity

By **DOUG FERGUSON**

AP Golf Writer

KIAWAH ISLAND, S.C. (AP)

— Among the congratulations that poured in for Phil Mickelson becoming the oldest major champion in golf was a video tweet from Jack Nicklaus, who is still good at math.

"You know, something sort of strikes me that 50 years old is older than 46," Nicklaus said with a grin. "Well done, my friend. Many more."

Many more? At age 50?

Mickelson plays a game with which Nicklaus might not be familiar, even though the most iconic of his 18 majors was Nicklaus winning the Masters at age 46.

During an interview at the end of 2016, Nicklaus said that sixth green jacket "was an accident in many ways." He started to scale back his schedule after winning two majors in 1980. He won twice more before the 1986 Masters, but he really wasn't playing much golf.

"It's really difficult when you've had as much success as I had over a long period of time to charge your batteries, day after day, and go back out and say, 'Man, I want to do this again,'" Nicklaus said.

That's where Mickelson stands alone.

The list of 24 players who have reached No. 1 since the world ranking began in 1986 does not include Mickelson, who is more ac-



Associated Press

complished than all but one of them. He has never won a PGA Tour money title. He has never been PGA Tour player of the year. He is not among the most elite group in golf with the career Grand Slam.

Only one of those can change. And even in the glow of his two-shot victory at Kiawah Island to win the PGA Championship, adding the U.S. Open still seems like a long shot.

That would stand as his greatest major. It might even top Tiger Woods winning the Masters after overcoming four back surgeries that left him wondering if he could ever play again.

What won't change regardless of what Lefty does next is his legacy of longevity. It doesn't sound all that

sensational. But it is.

Never mind Mickelson becoming the oldest player to win a major, breaking a record that had stood for 53 years.

Mickelson set another record Sunday as the first player in PGA Tour history to go 30 years between victories. He won his first when he was a junior at Arizona State. He won his 45th when his daughter was a senior at Brown.

"He's been on tour as long as I've been alive," Jon Rahm said. "For him to keep that willingness to play and compete and practice, even when it hasn't been working, it's truly admirable."

From his first full season on the PGA Tour, Mickelson never finished lower than

60th on the money list. That was last year, at age 49, during a season disrupted by the pandemic.

He made the Tour Championship 19 of his first 20 full seasons, the exception in 2003 when his wife went through a scary and troublesome pregnancy that ended well with their third child.

As for team competitions, Mickelson played his first Presidents Cup in 1994 and was part of every U.S. team until the last one in 2019 at Royal Melbourne. He hasn't missed a Ryder Cup since his 3-0 debut at Oak Hill in 1995.

Whether he's at Whistling Straits in September is to be determined.

The last American to win a major and be left off the

Ryder Cup team was Todd Hamilton, the British Open winner in 2004. The last American major winner left off any team was Keegan Bradley, who won the PGA Championship as a rookie in 2011. The final pick for the Presidents Cup went to Bill Haas, the FedEx Cup champion.

Neither was named Phil Mickelson.

Most remarkable about his longevity is that he kept working harder even as progress was difficult to see. Mickelson had gone more than two years without winning — except for two times he played on the 50-and-over PGA Tour Champions — and nine months without finishing in the top 20. He fell out of the top 100 in the world in March. The last time he was outside the top 100 was August 1993, three weeks after Jordan Spieth was born.

And still he pressed on without any secret sauce except to keep trying.

"My desire to play is the same," he said. "I've never been driven by exterior things. I've always been intrinsically motivated because I love to compete, I love playing the game. I love having opportunities to play against the best at the highest level. That's what drives me, and the belief that I could still do it inspired me to work harder. "I just didn't see why it couldn't be done," he said. "It just took a little bit more effort." □

PGA apologizes to Mickelson, Koepka for fans on final hole



Brooks Koepka, left, and Phil Mickelson watch Mickelson putt on the fourth green during the final round at the PGA Championship golf tournament on the Ocean Course, Sunday, May 23, 2021, in Kiawah Island, S.C.

Associated Press

KIAWAH ISLAND, S.C. (AP)

— PGA of America CEO Seth Waugh has apolo-

gized to winner Phil Mickelson and Brooks Koepka for fans rushing onto the 18th

hole at the PGA Championship on Sunday.

After Mickelson's approach landed on the 18th green, spectators rushed past the ropes, marshals and security at the Ocean Course, quickly swarming the competitors as they played the 72nd hole.

Waugh said Monday the organization regretted that the scene "made two players and their caddies feel vulnerable."

Waugh's statement, released on social media,

said the charge came from "a moment of high elation and pent-up emotion by spectators" and overwhelmed security.

The 50-year-old Mickelson finished off the victory, becoming the oldest player to win a major title. Koepka tied for second with Louis Oosthuizen.

Mickelson said the scene "was a little bit unnerving, but it was exceptionally awesome, too."

Koepka said his surgically repaired right knee got hit

by people as he tried to break through the crowd. Koepka wondered if someone purposely tried to hurt him. "I don't know, it felt somebody tried to ..." he said, cutting off his thought. "I don't know what the deal was, but it's what it is."

Waugh said player safety is a chief goal and he was glad order was restored. Fans circled the final green and celebrated when Mickelson finished off the win. □